

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 3700

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, PORS, ELAB, CS
SUBJ: CONFRONTATION BETWEEN GOCR AND COMMUNIST LABOR MOVEMENT

REF: SAN JOSE 3389

SUMMARY: AN ANTICIPATED DIRECT CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE LAW-AND-ORDER CARAZO ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNIST-LED LABOR FORCES IN COSTA RICA MAY BE IMMINENT. THE PRESIDENT STATED LATE AUGUST 29 THAT IF STRIKING SOCIAL SECURITY WORKERS DO NOT RETURN TO WORK BY THE AFTERNOON OF AUGUST 30, THE GOCR WILL ACT TO ENFORCE THE LAW; STRIKERS WILL BE REMOVED BY THE CIVIL GUARD, THOSE WHO DO NOT RETURN TO WORK WILL BE FIRED, UNION LEADERS WILL BE ARRESTED, AND FOREIGN "AGITATORS" EXPELLED. AT THE SAME TIME, UNION LEADERS ON THE LEFT VOW TO PARALYZE PORT AND BANANA PLANTATION OPERATIONS, IF THE GOCR ACTS WITH FORCE. GOCR ACTION TO BREAK THE ILLEGAL STRIKE WOULD TAKE PLACE AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF GOVERNMENT ALLEGATIONS OF A MORE GENERALIZED MOVEMENT TO DESTABILIZE COSTA RICA, THEY CONSIDER TO BE ORGANIZED BY THE COMMUNISTS -- BOTH COSTA RICAN AND EXTRATERRITORIAL. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FIRST ONE HUNDRED DAYS OF THE CARAZO ADMINISTRATION ARE OVER AND THE SIMMERING ANTAGONISM BETWEEN THE ADMINISTRATION AND COSTA RICA'S COMMUNINSTS (IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT AND ELSEWHERE)
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NOW THREATENS TO BOIL. THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE IS A SEVEN-DAY-OLD STRIKE OF WORKERS IN THE LARGE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM (CCSS), A STOPPAGE WHICH HAS SEVERELY REDUCED MEDICAL SERVICE IN THE COUNTRY. THE EXPECTED DECLARATION BY THE SUPREME COURT THAT THE STRIKE IS ILLEGAL PRESENTED THE GOCR THE OPPORTUNITY TO ACT ON ITS OFT-DECLARED POLICY OF FIRMLY ENFORCING THE LAW AND, NOT INCIDENTALLY, OF REDUCING COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN KEY LABOR AND POLITICAL SECTORS.

PRESIDENT CARAZO REAFFIRMED THIS STAND IN A PUBLIC ADDRESS THE EVENING OF THE 29TH, INSISTING THAT HE WOULD ACT TO END THE STRIKE AND KEEP THE HOSPITALS OPEN. HE DECLARED A DEADLINE OF 2 P.M. AUGUST 30TH, BY WHICH TIME WORKERS MUST RETURN TO WORK OR FACE ARREST AND/OR DISMISSAL FROM THEIR JOBS. GOCR SOURCES HAVE ALSO INDICATED THAT THE OPPORTUNITY WILL BE USED TO EXPEL FROM COSTA RICA A NUMBER OF LEFTIST INTERNS (PRESUMABLY CHILEANS) WHO HAVE TAKEN AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE STRIKE.

2. AT THE SAME TIME VARIOUS GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS CONTINUE TO INDICATE PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY THAT THE CCSS STRIKE IS MERELY A PART OF A WIDER POLITICAL EFFORT BY COMMUNIST ELEMENTS TO DESTABILIZE THE COUNTRY AND TO TEST THE CARAZO ADMINISTRATION. CITED AS EVIDENCE ARE THE PRESENCE OF "EXTREME LEFT POLITICAL LEADERS" ALONGSIDE THE STRIKERS, THE ALLEGED COMPLICITY OF UN-NAMED "DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS" (READ THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY) IN THE STRIKE ORGANIZATION, THE PROFESSIONAL "GUERRILLA STYLE" ROBBERY TUESDAY MORNING OF NEARLY THREE MILLION COLONES FROM A SAFE ON A UNITED BRANDS PLANTATION (ALLEGEDLY TO FINANCE THE CCSS STRIKE), AND CONTINUING PLANS FOR A MASSIVE WORK STOPPAGE IN MID-SEPTEMBER IN THE PACIFIC BANANA ZONE.

3. COMMENT: THERE IS LITTLE IF ANY EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO US TO SUPPORT THE GOCR'S CONCLUSION THAT CURRENT AND PROJECTED LABOR PROBLEMS ARE PART OF AN EXTERNALLY-FOSTERED COMMUNIST CONSPIRACY. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOCR'S SENSITIVITY ON THIS POINT IS GROWING.
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ADDING TO THE OVERALL PROBLEM IS SUBSTANTIAL TENSION AMONG GOCR LEADERS ROOTED IN THEIR AWARENESS THAT, PUBLIC SECURITY FORCES ARE ILL-TRAINED AND POORLY EQUIPPED TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC ORDER SHOULD THE LABOR PROBLEMS LEAD TO ANY SIGNIFICANT CIVIL DISORDER.
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